

Corps Enters Agreement with NRC to Review the Upper Mississippi River-- Illinois Waterway System Restructured Navigation Study

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has entered into an agreement with the National Research Council (NRC) to conduct a review of the Upper Mississippi River -Illinois Waterway Restructured Navigation Study. The Upper Mississippi River -Illinois Waterway navigation system contains 37 lock and dam sites (43 locks) and about 1,200 miles of navigable waterway. The feasibility study for improvements to the waterway system was initiated in 1993 but was significantly restructured in 2001 in response to concerns over the direction of the study and associated public controversy. The guidelines for restructuring the study were based on recommendations in a February 2001 report by the NRC and input of a Federal Principals Group that the Chief of Engineers established to provide study direction and guidance. The Principals Group consists of Washington-level representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, the Maritime Administration, and the Corps. The restructured study is focused on both the need to achieve navigation efficiency and ecological integrity with a goal of an environmentally sustainable navigation system.

The NRC review will be conducted by an expert committee of approximately 13 members with a breadth of expertise including aquatic ecology, agricultural and transportation economics, water resources planning, systems engineering, public policy, econometrics, transportation, watershed science, hydrologic engineering and system operations. Qualified committee members will likely come from academia, industry, consulting, government, and non-governmental organizations. The committee will conduct its review on a parallel path with other study activities and provide input at key study milestones and decision points. The independent review will be conducted generally in accordance with the NRC recommendations in its recent report Review Procedures for Water Resources Project Planning and will help assess the effectiveness of independent review for large controversial studies.